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Application No. 09/802,834  
Amendment dated April 24, 2006  
Reply to Office Action of January 24, 2006

**Amendments to the Claims:**

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the application.

**Listing of Claims**

1. (Currently amended) A post comprising ~~a~~ an inground footing adapted to be driven into the ground, said inground footing including a socket member that is protected against deformation while being implanted into the ground by an outer sleeve, said socket member being substantially fully inserted into said outer sleeve, said outer sleeve having trailing and leading ends, said leading end being adapted to be forcibly driven into the ground in response to a driving force applied to said trailing end, said socket member being received within said outer sleeve with said leading end of said outer sleeve extending beyond said socket member so as to define a free space extending axially below said socket member for absorbing the shock in the event that an obstacle is encountered while said footing is being driven into the ground, thereby preventing the socket member from being damaged, an elongated post segment, and a connector axially inserted into said elongated post segment and said socket member for joining said post segment and said footing together in an end-to-end relationship, said connector having a lower end portion received into said socket member in said outer sleeve and an upper end portion extending axially above the socket member into the elongated post segment.

2. (Original) A post as defined in claim 1, wherein said socket member is pressure fitted within said outer sleeve.

3. (Original) A post as defined in claim 2, wherein said socket member is fully inserted within said outer sleeve with an upper end of said socket member leveled with said trailing end of said outer sleeve.

4. (Original) A post as defined in claim 1, wherein said outer sleeve is made of a non-galvanized material, whereas said socket member is made of a galvanized material.

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5. (Original) A post as defined in claim 1, wherein said leading end of said outer sleeve is flattened to facilitate the penetration thereof into the ground.

6. (Original) A post as defined in claim 1, wherein said outer sleeve and said socket member have respectively a square cross-section and an elliptical cross-section.

7. (Original) A post as defined in claim 1, further including at least one stabilizer removably fitted over said outer sleeve to provide lateral stability to said post.

8. (Original) A post as defined in claim 7, wherein said stabilizer includes a pair of strips having slots defined therein for allowing said strips to be inserted one into the other about said outer sleeve.

9. (Original) A post as defined in claim 8, wherein each said strip includes a first elongated segment and a second elongated segment extending at right angles from one end of said first segment, said strips being assembled together to form a pair of diverging arms on opposed sides of said sleeve.

10. (Currently amended) A footing for holding a post segment above a ground surface, comprising a socket member that is protected against deformation while being implanted into the ground by an outer sleeve, said socket member being substantially fully inserted into said outer sleeve ~~in a pre-assembled state~~, said outer sleeve having trailing and leading ends, wherein ~~in said pre-assembled state~~ said trailing end is directly accessible for receiving blows thereon in order to forcibly drive said leading end into the ground, said socket member being held within said outer sleeve with said leading end of said outer sleeve extending beyond said socket member so as to define a free space extending axially below said socket member for absorbing the shock in the event that an obstacle is encountered while said footing is being driven into the ground, thereby protecting the socket member against deformation, ~~wherein said socket member defines a socket adapted to receive a post structural member once said footing has been installed in the ground~~ and a connector having a lower end portion received into said socket member in said outer sleeve and an upper end extending axially outwardly

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from said socket member, said upper end of said connector being configured to fit within the post segment to be anchored in the ground.

11. (Original) A footing as defined in claim 10, wherein said socket member is pressure fitted within said outer sleeve.

12. (Original) A footing as defined in claim 11, wherein said socket member is fully inserted within said outer sleeve with an upper end of said socket member leveled with said trailing end of said outer sleeve.

13. (Original) A footing as defined in claim 10, wherein said outer sleeve is made of a non-galvanized material, whereas said socket member is made of a galvanized material.

14. (Original) A footing as defined in claim 10, wherein said leading end of said outer sleeve is flattened to facilitate the penetration thereof into the ground.

15. (Original) A footing as defined in claim 10, wherein said outer sleeve and said socket member have respectively a square cross-section and an elliptical cross-section.

16. (Original) A footing as defined in claim 10, further including at least one stabilizer removably fitted over said outer sleeve to provide lateral stability.

17. (Original) A footing as defined in claim 16, wherein said stabilizer includes a pair of strips having slots defined therein for allowing said strips to be inserted one into the other about said outer sleeve.

18. (Original) A post as defined in claim 17, wherein each said strip includes a first elongated segment and a second elongated segment extending at right angles from one end of said first segment, said strips being assembled together to form a pair of diverging arms on opposed sides of said sleeve.

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19. (Withdrawn) A method of anchoring a post in a ground surface, comprising the steps of providing a sleeve having trailing and leading ends, pressure fitting a socket member into said sleeve, forcibly driving said sleeve into a ground surface with said socket member therein, and connecting an above-ground post segment to said socket member

20. (Withdrawn) A method as defined in claim 19, wherein the step of connecting an above-ground post segment comprises the step of axially inserting a connector into said socket member, and fitting the above-ground segment over said connector.

21. (Previously presented) A post comprising a footing adapted to be driven into the ground, said footing including a socket member that is protected against deformation while being implanted into the ground by an outer sleeve, said outer sleeve having trailing and leading ends, said leading end being adapted to be forcibly driven into the ground in response to a driving force applied to said trailing end, said socket member being received within said outer sleeve with said leading end of said outer sleeve extending beyond said socket member to absorb the shock and thereby protect the socket member in the event that an obstacle is encountered while said footing is being driven into the ground, an elongated post segment, and a connector axially inserted into said elongated post segment and said socket member for joining said post segment and said footing together in an end-to-end relationship, further including at least one stabilizer removably fitted over said outer sleeve to provide lateral stability to said post, wherein said stabilizer includes a pair of strips having slots defined therein for allowing said strips to be inserted one into the other about said outer sleeve.

22. (Previously presented) A post as defined in claim 21, wherein each said strip includes a first elongated segment and a second elongated segment extending at right angles from one end of said first segment, said strips being assembled together to form a pair of diverging arms on opposed sides of said sleeve.